

Message Text

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TAGS: PINS, PINT, VN, TH

SUBJ: PRESS ARTICLE ON VIETNAMESE IN THAILAND

SUMMARY: THE THAI GOVERNMENT (RTG) IS CONCERNED OVER ITS LARGE AND GENERALLY PRO-COMMUNIST VIETNAMESE REFUGEE POPULATION, MOST OF WHOM LIVE IN THE ECONOMICALLY-DEPRESSED NORTHEAST. MANY OF THE ESTIMATED 50,000-60,000 REFUGEES HAVE LIVED IN THAILAND SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II. SINCE 1964 THERE HAS BEEN NO REPATRIATION OF VIETNAMESE TO NORTH VIETNAM. THAI OFFICIALS FEAR THE THREAT OF A VIETNAMESE "FIFTH COLUMN" IN THE NORTHEAST AIDING THAI COMMUNIST INSURGENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON FEBRUARY 11, LOCAL ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER VISETSAK SANGUANPONG FILED A REPORT ON THE TROUBLESOME VIETNAMESE REFUGEE POPULATION IN THAILAND, FOLLOWING LENGTHY RESEARCH IN NORTH-EASTERN THAILAND, WHERE MOST REFUGEES ARE LOCATED. TEXT OF STORY FOLLOWS, IN CASE IT WAS NOT CARRIED IN U.S. PRESS. DATELINE NONG KHAI, THAILAND, QTE BESET BY A GROWING INSURGENCY, OFFICIALS ARE INCREASINGLY WORRIED THAT THAILAND'S VIETNAMESE REFUGEE POPULATION IS CREATING A MAJOR SECURITY RISK AND A "BUILT-IN BRIDGEHEAD" FOR ANY POSSIBLE INCURSION FROM THE COUNTRY'S COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS.

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MOST OF THE 50,000-60,000 VIETNAMESE LIVE IN THE COUNTRY'S MOST VULNERABLE AND INSURGENT-INFESTED AREA - THE NORTHEAST, WHICH BORDERS ON LAOS AND IS NOT VERY FAR FROM NORTH VIETNAM. TOP-RANKING THAI OFFICIALS SAY THERE IS AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT A NUMBER OF THE REFUGEES ARE PROVIDING SHELTER, FOOD AS WELL AS MANPOWER TO THE INSURGENTS, WHO ALSO RECEIVE AID FROM VIETNAM.

"WE MUST KEEP A CONSTANT EYE ON THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES FOR THE SAFETY OF MY COUNTRY," MAJ. GENERAL SITTI SAVETSIRA, SECRETARY (SIC) OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, SAID IN A RECENT INTERVIEW.

THE LONG-STANDING SECURITY PROBLEM WITH THE VIETNAMESE, MOST OF WHOM HAVE LIVED IN THAILAND FOR ALMOST THREE DECADES, HAS IN RECENT MONTHS BEEN COMPOUNDED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THOUSANDS OF LAOTIANS AND CAMBODIANS FLEEING THEIR COMMUNIST REGIMES AND CREATING, ACCORDING TO THAI SECURITY OFFICIALS, ANOTHER POTENTIAL SOURCE OF SUBVERSION.

ALTHOUGH VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE DATES BACK FARTHER, THE REFUGEES FLED TO THAILAND IN THE WAKE OF FIGHTING BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND COMMUNIST-LED VIET MINH FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II, AND THE THAIS HAVE CONSIDERED THEM A BURDEN SINCE.

IN THE PAST, THE THAI GOVERNMENT CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED A PLAN TO DISPERSE THEM, TRIED REPEATEDLY TO REPATRIATE THE VIETNAMESE BUT NEVER SERIOUSLY PLANNED TO ASSIMILATE THIS MINORITY GROUP. ABOUT 39,000 REFUGEES WERE SENT HOME BETWEEN 1960 AND 1964 AND THAILAND'S FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN HAS SAID HE WOULD BRING UP THE ISSUE AGAIN WITH HANOI IF AND WHEN HE GOES THERE FOR TALKS WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE VIETNAMESE ABOUT REPATRIATION IS VARIED. "I SEND MONEY TO MY HOME PLACE IN NORTH VIETNAM EVERY MONTH. I DON'T LIKE TO STAY IN THAILAND PERMANENTLY," ONE GROCERYSTORE OWNER SAID IN THIS LAO-THAI BORDER TOWN.

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"MOST OF US KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OUR HOMELAND BY LISTENING TO THE RADIO. WE ARE URGING THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO LET US RETURN TO VIETNAM."

THE HOMES OF MANY VIETNAMESES - MOST OF THEM SHOPKEEPERS OR SKILLED WORKERS - DISPLAY THE PORTRAIT OF VIETNAM'S "REVOLUTIONARY FATHER", HO CHI MINH, AS WELL AS SLOGANS READING "THE COUNTRY ABOVE ALL" AND "LONG LIVE HO CHI MINH". "UNCLE"

HO'S BIRTHDAY IS A MAJOR CELEBRATION, AND VIETNAMESE IS SPOKEN ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN THE HOMES OF THE REFUGEES.

BUT MANY SAY THEY WOULDN'T RETURN TO A COUNTRY SOME HAVE NEVER SEEN, ALTHOUGH THEY MAINTAIN CLOSE, EMOTIONAL BONDS WITH IT. INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY WESTERN SCHOLARS IN THE MID-1960'S SHOWED MOST OF THE REFUGEES DIDN'T WANT TO RETURN, CITING THE DANGERS AND HARDSHIPS CREATED BY THE WAR. WITH PEACE IN VIETNAM, RESULTS OF INTENSIVE INTERVIEWS NOW MIGHT WELL PROVE DIFFERENT.

"WE WILL CONTINUE TELLING OUR CHILDREN TO BE PATRIOTIC TO THEIR OWN COUNTRY BECAUSE OUR COUNTRY WAS BUILT BY HO CHI MINH WHO BRAVELY THREW OUT ALL THOSE WHO TRIED TO SNATCH AWAY OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS", SAYS PHAM DONG KONG, A FORTY-SEVEN YEAR OLD REFUGEE FROM SOUTH VIETNAM LIVING IN THE NORTHEASTERN PROVINCE OF NAKORN PHANOM.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO PLACE FIGURES ON THE NUMBER OF ACTIVE COMMUNIST SUPPORTERS AND SYMPATHIZERS AMONG THE REFUGEE POPULATION. OFFICIALS AT THAILAND'S ANTI-COMMUNIST AGENCY ESTIMATE HALF ARE ACTIVE SUPPORTERS.

WESTERN SOURCES IN BANGKOK SAY THAT ABOUT 5,000 PEOPLE IN THE NORTHEAST - MOST OF THEM VIETNAMESE REFUGEES - HAVE SUFFICIENT TRAINING AND INDOCTRINATION THAT THEY COULD, IF ARMED, "JOIN THE RANKS OF THE INSURGENTS OVERNIGHT." THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 10,000 ARMED COMMUNIST-LED GUERRILLAS COUNTRYWIDE AND WESTERN MILITARY OBSERVERS AGREE THAT BRINGING ARMS FROM NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS ACROSS THAILAND'S "POROUS BORDER" IS A SIMPLE MATTER.

A CLANDESTINE GROUP CALLED THE OVERSEAS PATRIOTIC VIETNAMESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASSOCIATION IS ACTIVE AMONG THE REFUGEES, ACCORDING TO THE INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND. IN THE PAST THE THAI GOVERNMENT HAS CLAIMED THAT THE ASSOCIATION CONDUCTS INDOCTRINATION OF THAI YOUTH, SOLICITS CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NORTH VIETNAM, SETS UP AN ESPIONAGE NETWORK WITHIN THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY AND RECRUITS PROMISING YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN FOR TRAINING IN NORTH VIETNAM - WITH THE AIM OF SENDING THEM BACK TO THAILAND AS COMMUNIST CADRE.

IT IS THIS NETWORK - REINFORCED BY VIETNAMESE WAR SUPPLIES THAT WESTERN SOURCES SAY ARE CONTINUING TO FIND THEIR WAY INTO THAILAND - THAT THE THAI SECURITY OFFICIALS FEAR.

THE BANGKOK GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE INCREASED THE PROBLEM BY ITS UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE VIETNAMESE AS ANYTHING

MORE THAN "TEMPORARY", AND THAI RESENTMENT HAS IN THE PAST
ERUPTED INTO VIOLENCE AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE. THE LAST SUCH
INCIDENTS OCCURRED NOVEMBER, 1975, WHEN THAI YOUTHS RANSACKED
THE HOMES OF REFUGEES LIVING HERE. END QUOTE.
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